

Teachers...from Page 1A



The Towns County Board of Education votes on a measure in the Nov. 13 regular meeting. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

each year they do a tremendous job. All three of our candidates this year are excellent educators in our system.”

Elementary School Principal Dr. Sandy Page introduced Williams during the meeting, going through a long list of reasons why she was chosen as Teacher of the Year.

“Debi has been an educator for 24 years, and she joined our TCES team in 2005,” said Dr. Page. “She started teaching the fourth grade, and then she moved on to the fifth grade, where she co-taught science.”

“Eventually, we departmentalized, and she taught (English Language Arts). Then, she moved down to the science lab, where she began computer science programming for our students, and started the coding for our children, and robotics and STEM lab for our kids, and that opened up a whole new world for them.”

Last year, Williams helped to take Towns County robotics to the next level by presenting at a national technology conference at the University of Texas in Austin, after having assisted in a successful grant-writing effort to secure Finch Robots for the school.

Now, she teaches the accelerated and gifted program for kindergarten through fifth-grade students.

“Debi is also co-sponsor of our robotics team and our (FIRST LEGO League) team at the elementary school, as well as our Science Olympiad team,” said Dr. Page, who called Williams a motivator. “We’re very proud of all the work that she’s done in our science program at the elementary.”

Continued Dr. Page: “Colleagues at the elementary chose Debi as our teacher of the year because of her positive attitude, and how she truly cares about our school system. Last year at Christmastime, a teacher left, and she was asked to go into that position.

“She did not even have to think twice about it, she just went right into that role, and I appreciate that, and it really impressed all of our teachers.”

When it came time to announce the System Teacher of the Year, Dr. Berrong explained that an independent panel of educators from outside of the school system considered each of the three individual teachers of the year before choosing from among them.

“All three candidates are extremely deserving of this honor, but I’m excited to announce that Mrs. Debi Williams is our System Teacher of the Year,” said Dr. Berrong, before Amy Barrett presented each of the teachers with gifts on behalf of the Parent Teacher

Student Organization.

After the meeting, Williams said she was in awe of having been selected as both TCES Teacher of the Year and System Teacher of the Year.

“Having three boys in the Towns County School System, I know the excellent teachers our system has, so I am humbled,” said Williams.

Williams’ favorite thing about Towns County Elementary is, first and foremost, her students, in whom she loves to imbue senses of confidence and enthusiasm when it comes to learning.

She said that if she had to sum up her teaching philosophy simply, it would be that she sees herself as a builder.

“A builder of their intelligence, a builder of their spirit, a builder of their appreciation of others and themselves, a builder to see a world larger than themselves and of Towns County,” said Williams.

As System Teacher of the Year, Williams will now go on to compete for the title of Georgia Teacher of the Year, sponsored by the Georgia Department of Education. She has until Dec. 22 to get all her paperwork in for consideration.

Check the upcoming Nov. 29 edition of the *Towns County Herald* for more Teacher of the Year coverage and interviews.

Education...from Page 1A

more.

The schools of Towns County owe their successes first and foremost to the teachers and students who put in the work every day to make sure they are always challenging themselves.

But then there’s the school board and board office that also get credit for CCRPI achievement and yearly progress, not to mention all the parents who encourage and support their children, as well as the community, which includes business owners and others interested in helping Towns County’s students to move confidently into the future.

“I would just like to say we’re very proud of the CCRPI scores in all three of our schools,” said Towns County Schools Superintendent Dr. Darren Berrong. “There are great things, obviously, happening at Towns County, both athletically and academically.”

Added Berrong: “We’re really moving these kids where they need to be, so I’m very



Maria Leyh, 16, is a foreign exchange student from Germany, and she spoke in the meeting about her time in an American school. Photo/Shawn Jarrard

proud of all three schools that are doing a tremendous job.”

RESA stands for Regional Educational Service Agency, and is made up of Towns County Comprehensive School and 14 neighboring school systems.

“The support we give to our school systems include facilitative,

consultative, technical and staff development services that promotes continuous school improvement planning, building system capacity to sustain change, and to connect school improvement plans to systemic improvement efforts,” according to www.PioneerRESA.org.

Franchise...from Page 1A

The council originally adopted the franchise fee ordinance to help the city collect extra revenue to be used for city improvements.

Franchise fees are commonplace outside of the Blue Ridge Mountain EMC, and can be thought of as a form of rent paid by utilities for running infrastructure through city property.

Blue Ridge Mountain EMC has made its position clear that it does not believe the ordinance to be in the best interest of its member customers, since it will be Hiawassee customers only paying for the roughly \$140,000 the city stands to collect annually in franchise fees.

The franchise fee ordinance directs the EMC to pay fees based on 4 percent of gross electric sales within city limits, and 5 percent of gross cable and fiber sales within the city.

Because the EMC would need to collect the fees from its member customers in Hiawassee, the fees would result in line item charges on

individual bills based on each customer’s consumption and services.

The average residential consumer’s electric bill would increase by \$55 a year under the franchise fee ordinance, though much larger consumers, such as churches and businesses, would face significantly higher franchise fees because they have higher power bills.

EMC General Manager Jeremy Nelms reiterated the EMC’s position in the Nov. 16 meeting of the BRMEMC Board of Directors.

In that meeting, he said the EMC maintains that the ordinance is invalid because it requires the EMC to accept the terms, and because it also

contains an incorrect date.

Nelms said that the EMC was not comfortable accepting a rate increase for 952 electric accounts in Hiawassee, and so the EMC would not willingly offer its acceptance of the Hiawassee Franchise Fee Ordinance.

EMC Board Director Roy Perren added that he had heard of cities and EMCs meeting to negotiate the terms of franchise fees, such as not collecting the fees from churches and other nonprofits.

The franchise fee ordinance remains a hot button issue for many residents in the Hiawassee City Limits, and Hiawassee residents wishing to voice their opinions should attend the Nov. 27 public hearing at Hiawassee City Hall.

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